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ABSTRACT

Historically, women have been socialized toward virtue and acceptance, and men have been socialized toward power and competence. M. Brewster Smith contends that opportunity, respect from others, and power must be present in order for one to cultivate a sense of competence. To be successful, the competent woman must combine skills, talents, and a variety of personal qualities that will enable her to work in her social environment and to achieve recognition and position. The prime vehicle by which one establishes competence and achieves success is a communicative process, verbal and nonverbal. There are specific communication characteristics and behaviors that seem to separate men and women. By cuing in on these differences and being aware of them, women will be better able to enhance their communication effectiveness regardless of whether they must withdraw, tolerate, educate, or overpower in a given communication situation. Another strategy for women is to request clarification when the content of a message and the way it was spoken do not coincide. A final strategy, called "reframing," is neither easily nor commonly used, but necessitates that a person "break out" of the presumed mental set or framework that others have imposed on him or her and assume that he or she accepts. Ultimately, to maximize communication prowess, both men and women must increase self-awareness and awareness of others, be as confirming and nonsubmissive as possible, and think about the relationship between their objectives and the appropriate communication strategies. (HTH)

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COMMUNICATION EFFECTIVENESS AND THE PROFESSIONAL WOMAN

PRESENTED TO THE WESTERN WOMAN'S ALLIANCE
WESTERN KENTUCKY UNIVERSITY
DECEMBER 15, 1981

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Communication Effectiveness and the Professional Woman

Being invited to speak before The Women's Alliance is both an honor and a challenge. As a former and still occassional teacher of public speaking, I began preparation in the traditional way. Once the topic area has been determined, the speaker is to craft a novel introduction, one that wins the audiences' attention and creates a warm and receptive atmosphere for presentation of the message. In preparation for this occassion I thought of a variety of ways to introduce my remarks. For example, I thought I might make some passing reference to feeling like the "token Male" in an all female group. Clever perhaps, but of potentially questionable service for warming the audience I reasoned. Or, I thought I could casually point out that "Some of my best friends are women," but that too had an empty ring. A sort of racial innuendo recast into a feminist context, or so I feared. Or a third possibility was to reverse the old, but common saying and suggest that "Behind every successful woman there's a good man," but that too seemed to miss the mark, althought research suggests that there is some small truth to that view.

Before I outline several strategies and suggest a number of techniques for enhancing communication effectiveness in the real world, permit me to refresh your memory and perhaps crystalize some thoughts about that real world, for surely we are all influenced by it.

Stanley Coopersmith has identified four bases by which people judge their self worth: 1. Power -- the ability to influence or control others

2. Virtue -- adherence to moral and ethical standards

3. Acceptance -- affection and attention from others, and
4. Competence -- successful performance in meeting demands for achievement

Historically, women in this society have been socialized toward virtue and acceptance, and men have been socialized toward power and competence. Generally, society rewards and values those who are powerful and competent, but typically, pays little more than lip service to those who are loved and ethical. Consequently, women who aspire to achieve power and competence often lose ground in the other areas, particularly in the area of acceptance. Powerful and competent women often threaten males and alienate many traditional females. And yet, the impact of traditional life styles on both men and women is a serious social issue with physical and psychological implications.

Drs. Elaine Carmen, Nancy Russo, and Jean Baker Miller writing in the October, 1981, issue of The American Journal of Psychiatry explore inequality and women's mental health. Equality, they write, is not to be equated with "sameness" or being "just like" members of the advantaged group -- males. Equality refers to "...the equal right to participate in all areas of the life of society and to pursue one's unique psychological potential in all its aspects." This includes the right to define one's self differently from the expected or historically derived definition or "proper feminity" and "women's place." American society is one of structured social inequality and there is an unequal distribution of rewards based on gender, race, and class differences. Consider some of the highlights of the dramatic changes in women's work and family status that have occurred despite unchanging sex based economic discrimination."

1. Fifty-five percent of all mothers with children under 18 were in the work force in 1979 -- as were Forty-five percent of all married women with children under six. In addition to hours devoted to paid

employment, married women spend, on the average, twenty-four hours per week on housework. Overwork causes stress.

2. Seven of ten working women will experience sexual harrassment on the job. Sexual harrassment causes stress.
3. Women tend to make fewer dollars than men with equal education and skills. Economic discrimination causes stress.

And the list of inequities cited by Carmen, Russo, and Miller goes on.

Inequality has obvious implications for the daily lives of women in the areas of economic status, power and prestige, and freedom of self determination. In addition, there are many complex and less obvious consequences of this system of stratification in which a woman's sense of idenity is developed within a framework that defines women as a de-valued group. Boys are taught that success as a man is contingent on the assertive use of individual talents and skills to insure autonomy and achievement. Girls, however, are taught that the adult woman's success will be acquired only indirectly throught the status of the male alliance she makes. This knowledge is transmitted through patterns of sex role socialization in which boys are encouraged to develop patterns of self worth based on personal achievement while girls' self esteem remains dependent on acceptance by others.

Since men hold power and authority, women are rewarded for developing a set of psychological characteristics that accommodate and please traditional males, which is most of us. Such traits -- submissiveness, compliance, passivity, helplessness, and weakness have been encouraged in women. The net impact of the psychological traits, inequality, and stress is revealed in the correlates of many women's lives:

Depression - Depression is closely associated with being female in this society. Twice as many females seek professional help in dealing with depression as males. Stress and powerlessness lead to depression.

Mental Illness - Married women have higher rates of mental illness than married men. Carmen, Russo, and Miller contend that the excess of psychological symptoms in women is not intrinsic to femaleness, but rather to the conditions of subordination that characterize traditional female roles.

So, how does one set about enhancing one's self image against the historical and social background of American society?

M. Brewster Smith has written about several important considerations in developing a positive self image, that is, a sense of the competent self. Three considerations must be present in order for one to cultivate a sense of competence: (1) opportunity, (2) respect, and (3) power. Opportunity provides a feeling of hopefulness about the future. Respect by others is necessary for self respect, and power is what insures both respect and opportunity. Without opportunity people face hopelessness. Without respect from others we face self-hatred and without power we are vulnerable and dependent. As you probably know far better than I, opportunity for women has been limited, respect is insured neither by living out traditional roles nor is it always readily available to those who reject the traditional mold. Lastly, being powerful and feminine have been viewed as almost mutually exclusive, but as many can testify, they are not.

Rosalind Barnett and Garce Baruch in their book, The Competent Woman devote a chapter to successful women. Success may be viewed as the attainment of a desired goal or favorable outcome with regard to some undertaking. Moreover, success also has a social dimension in that it implies social recognition, social rewards, and a measure of social position. In short, a degree of power and respect flow from success. Success, however, does not insure competence, nor does competence

insure success, although the two overlap in many, if not most cases. Some incompetents are successful, just as some competents are unsuccessful. For example, the corporate executive's son who assumes a beginning position as a vice president while lacking the requisite skills is a case of the successful incompetent. Conversely, the managerially skilled woman who is forced to assume a secreterial position rather than one in management is an example of the unsuccessful competent. The key to matching competence with success lies in insuring that others recognize and value competence and respond in ways that insure one's success. To be successful, Barnett and Baruch maintain, the competent woman must combine many elements -- skills, talents, and a variety of personal qualities that will enable her to work in her social environment and achieve recognition and position.

Not a great deal is known about competent and successful women, partly because until recently so few have managed to emerge against near overwhelming social odds. We do know, however, that their backgrounds frequently have a number of common characteristics. Successful professional American women typically come from affluent families, often have one or more parent with a high occupational and/or educational status, frequently are the eldest or only child and characteristically have no brothers. While this is perhaps modestly interesting, there is not much any of us can do about past history or the circumstances surrounding our birth. But there is much we can do to shape the present and the future.

In the balance of my presentation I wish to advance the thesis that the prime vehicle by which one establishes competence and achieves success in the eyes of others is a communicative process. Communication here is broadly meant to refer to the assignment of meaning or message value to stimuli, be they verbal or nonverbal. Clearly, my operating assumption is that competence exists and that the key to linking it with success and upward mobility is to identify a strategy

and implement one or more of a variety of techniques to communicate that competence to others -- no mean task to say the least. There is, however, at least one important qualification or perhaps more accurately, limitation in the communication arena. The limitation has to do with the nature of the other person or persons to whom you address yourself or who assign meanings to you and your behaviors. No one can attain success through influencing others if the others refuse or otherwise fail to participate in the transaction. Thus, the attitudes, intelligence, common sense, and basic notions of decency and fair play of the other are absolutely crucial influences on communication outcomes. Assessing these factors in yourself and your intended receivers provides the key information for determining which of the available strategies are best suited to the situation. When dealing with others there are only four basic strategies available: (1) withdraw, (2) tolerate, (3) educate, and (4) overpower.

Let me comment briefly on each of these strategies and then turn to some specific observations and techniques that can be plied in one or more tactical maneuvers. First, withdrawal. If after careful consideration of all the seemingly important factors, you conclude that no matter what you do or how well you do it, no matter what you say or how well you say it or how often or for how long; that no change, no recognition, no upward mobility is possible; then withdraw and get out. Find another position, relationship, or whatever. There are times when communication; overt, covert, verbal, nonverbal, or what have you, will not change a thing. In such cases we are better off devoting our time and efforts where they will be appreciated or at least hold forth the opportunity for hope.

The second strategy is to tolerate the situation. This is a personally unrewarding option, but often a necessary strategy, at least temporarily. Those who tolerate an unacceptable prospect for their talents and aspirations usually face a conflict between economic necessity on the one hand and the drain of self

respect on the other. This a dangerous strategy for without hope, it's only a matter of time before the loss of self respect produces, in the imagery of Emily Dickinson, "A Life Without Life." Many women, and many men too, have lives lacking in stimulation, vitality, and spirit.

The third strategy, education, calls for sensitive, reasoned exchanges between individuals. And, in the best of all worlds, this strategy would provide reasonable access to upward mobility, satisfaction, power, and self fulfillment. Those who demonstrate competence would be naturally recognized by others and rewarded accordingly. Unfortunatly, as you probably know, sexual discrimination itself demonstrates that education does not always work. Yet, I believe it is the best strategy, <u>assuming</u> that the other interactants suffer more from ignorance and bad training than malice. In my view, women in this society <u>are</u> victims of discrimination and social injustice; men suffer doubly because they are both victims and perpetrators -- although few people realize this.

The last major strategy is to overpower the other. I am not advocating physical violence here nor Lysistratian maneuvers, but rather that stronger and more affirmative steps be taken to influence the opposition. Such steps can range from direct verbal confrontations of an interpersonal nature, to legal action, to economic and/or labor boycotts. All of the strategies, withdrawal, toleration, education, and overpowering, are options that entail a variety of communication moves. Yet, before you resign your present position in search of better opportunity, or organize a social movement to overcome the cause of frustration let's take a look at some of the specific communication characteristics and behaviors that seem to set women and men apart. By cueing on these differences and being aware of them, women will be better able to enhance their communication effectiveness regardless of which major strategy they embrace. In

addition to noting differences, I want to suggest several enhancement techniques and tactics for consideration.

1. Many women tend to use tag questions and most men do not. For example, a woman is inclined to say "This is a challenging task, isn't it" A man would say "This is a challenging task." Do not use tag questions. State your position or view without equivocation or an implicit request for approval from or acceptance by others.
2. Women are more inclined than men to qualify their ideas and demonstrate greater concern for the feelings and ideas of others. Certain adjectives like "cute" "pretty" and "nice" are more frequently used by women than men. Be selective and descriptive in your choice of adjectives. Avoid unnecessary and/or tentative qualifications.
3. Men speak more forcefully and often swear more than women. Now, there is some doubt as to whether or not this difference still exists. Contemporary women, upon having been informed that a male linguist once observed that women reportedly feel "an instinctive shrinking from coarse and gross expression," have been heard to respond "Oh, shit!" The enchancement technique implicit here is to refuse to feel inhibited or intimidated by males who speak forcefully and/or swear. You need not respond in kind, but to tolerate that which is personally unacceptable to you is to demonstrate submission and powerlessness.
4. Men talk more than women in terms of amount of time consumed when speaking. The enhancement technique is to speak up and command your fair share of the conversation.

5. Women are less likely to interrupt a conversation than men. Assert yourself -- interrupt, or at least refuse to tolerate being interrupted. This is not a call to be thoughtless or impulsive, but rather an urging to recognize that interruption is a viable tactic for securing equal footing in converstaions.
6. Women are more likely than males to disclose information about themselves. Be cautious about how much you reveal. Offer no more than is necessary, depending, of course, upon the relationship, but generally no more than is offered by the other. Monitor what you reveal.
7. When a male and female are engaged in a distasteful or argumentative interaction with one another, the female is more likely to withdraw first. To withdraw first is to suggest submission, so hang in there a while longer.
8. Women smile more than men. Smiling is a friendly gesture, but it is also a submissive one. Be more aware of your tendency to smile and if necessary curtail it when appropriate.
9. Females have learned to take in more visual information than do males. This tendency may account for why females are generally more accurate than males in judging the emotions of others. Here we have readily tapable communication resource. But females often have difficulty making direct eye contact -- look directly into the other's eyes and make use of all your senses.
10. Men are more likely to touch and women are more likely to be touched. Sex differences in touching behavior tend to parallel status differences. High status or dominate figures touch; subordinates tend to be touched. Minimize opportunities for others to touch you or maximize the opportunities to touch

them -- the implicit message is that the one who initiates touch dominates the other -- but as you are probably aware, the sexual politics of females touching males in this society are conceivably dangerous, so use judgment.

11. Women prefer reduced physical distances and greater contact with others, while men prefer greater distances and less contact. Acceptance, one of Coopersmith's bases for self worth associated with the traditional female role, is closely related to the affilitative tendencies suggested by reducing physical distances and enhancing contact with others. To increase distance and reduce contact is a power move.

12. I have not yet said anything about dress or appearance as a technique to enhance communication effectiveness. Notwithstanding the "how to dress for success books" that are currently popular, dress is a function of economics, job demands, and personal taste. The basic enhancement technique is to dress so as to project an image that is consistent with one you wish to convey.

13. Throughout many of the points I have enumerated, there is a fundamental urging for women to become less subtle and less indirect and more direct in communication transactions. Subtly and indirectness are culturally approved behaviors for women -- when one is oppressed, one learns to be subtle. Cultivate being clear and direct when communicating.

14. Learn and practice saying "No" without feeling guilty. Guilt is a worthless feeling but in our society guilt is frequently invoked by both self and others to make us conform or otherwise respond as we are "suppose to." Say no to guilt, its your right.

15 Don't apologize for doing what you want or saying what you believe or feel. Apology, of course, is appropriate when we offend or injure without meaning to, but unless there is a basis for apology, don't offer one.

Thus far, the kinds of techniques I have suggested are largely derived from the reasonably well documented differences that seem to characterize women as communicators in comparison with men. To some extent such a comparison is necessary, if only for illustrative purposes, because it is the socialized male model that has, so to speak, ruled the professional world, at least until recently. Yet, there are other techniques that one can employ to enhance communication effectiveness.

Paul Watzlawick, Janet Beavin, and Don Jackson contend that all communication takes place on two levels: content and relationship. The content dimension refers to the actual denotative meaning suggested by the words employed. The second dimension involves the feelings and relationship between the interactants. Typically, content is conveyed by the words and/or sounds and relationship is conveyed by nonverbal cues and vocal intonation. When two people interact, one of the most effective ways to receive positive responses from the other is to confirm them as a person. Acknowledge his or her presence and give a supportive response. Typically, the content or the words expressed will coincide with the way they were presented. We say pleasant things in pleasant ways. People, however, are also fully capable of sending messages that cleverly disconfirm one's worth as a person. If, for example, someone says "That's a wonderful idea," but the tone and demeanor by which the message is delivered belies the verbal message, then you have been disconfirmed. Your are burdened with two messages, one verbal and one nonverbal, that seemingly conflict. He said it was a wonderful idea, but it did not sound

like he meant it. An important technique to enhance your communication effectiveness with others involves not letting other people deny responsibility for their messages. Two response options are available: either (A) make an explicit comment in which you call for clarification as to what was really meant or (B) accept only one level of the message and go on. An example of the latter would be if a friend says with a downcast face and demeanor "You go on to the conference and have a good time, I'll just stay here and work." You may either say, for example, "OK, Great, I'll see you when I get back." or, you could choose to respond at the relational level by saying "The way you responded tells me you want to go too." In either event, do not permit others to disconfirm and/or confuse you. Make them assume responsibility for their messages.

The last technique I want to mention is call reframing. Reframing is not easily or commonly used. It necessitates that you "break out" of the presumed mental set or framwork that others have imposed upon you and assume you accept. Mark Twain's Tom Sawyer provides a classic illustration. Tom, as you may recall, wanted to play with his friends, but was directed by his Aunt to whitewash the fence. If he played, he'd suffer the wrath of his Aunt; if he painted, he'd miss out with his friends. Tom "reframed" the situation by co-opting his friends into whitewashing the fence and paying him for the priviledge. As a result of this reframing, both he and his Aunt were happy; whereas only one would have been happy otherwise. While Tom's reframing was most clever, one may also use confusion or humor to effect the same thing. One urban police officer, while issuing a minor traffic ticket, became surrounded by an increasingly hostile crowd. Indeed, he was not certain he could return to his patrol car. It occurred to him to announce in a loud voice "You have just witnessed the issuance of a traffic ticket by a member of your police department." And, while the crowd considered the deeper meaning of the obvious, the police officer got into his car and drove off.

Communication involves much more than just what we say. A holistic notion of communication maintains that whenever someone assigns meaning or message value to us or our behavior, communication has occurred. Thus almost everything about us is a potential cue that others may take note of and assign meaning to. Communication effectiveness is not only a bridge to competence, success, and power, but is in many ways the badge by which we identify the competent. If one hopes to maximize her or his communication prowess, then she or he must cultivate several habits:

1. Increase your self awareness. What intentional and unintentional cues do you offer to others?
2. Increase your awareness of others. What cues do they offer to you? Are there any cues that you are missing?
3. Conduct yourself so as to be as confirming and nonsubmissive as possible.
4. Think about the relationship between your objectives and the communication strategies and tactics you can operationalize to attain them.

Communication in a social world is not inherently a matter of words and their dictionary meanings. It's a matter of behavior and conduct. Eleanor Roosevelt once stated that "One's philosophy is not best expressed in words, it is expressed in the choices one makes ... and the choices we make are ultimately our responsibility." Make choices about your communication behavior. Seize control of your life, your future, and your happiness -- It's <u>your</u> responsibility.

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